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# **HO'OPONOPONO**

Professor John Barkai

William S. Richardson School of Law  
University of Hawaii at Manoa  
2515 Dole Street • Honolulu, Hawaii 96822  
Phone (808) 956-6546 • Fax (808) 956-5569  
E-mail: [barkai@hawaii.edu](mailto:barkai@hawaii.edu)  
<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~barkai>

# Ho'oponopono: Some Lessons from Hawaiian Mediation

*James A. Wall, Jr. and Ronda Roberts Callister*

Are you willing to kala your brother?  
Free him entirely of this entanglement of your anger?  
Remember, as you loosen your brother from his trespasses,  
you loosen yourself, too.  
As you forgive, you are forgiven.

— Mediator's questions in ho'oponopono  
(Pukui, Haertig and Lee 1982: 63)

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While conflict and conflict management are obviously found throughout the world, most of the dominant theories and practice today focus on Western perspectives, neglecting non-Western viewpoints (Horowitz and Boardman 1994). To overcome this deficiency, we in the past have studied conflict management — specifically mediation — in the Pacific Rim countries, China (Wall and Blum 1991; Wall et al., in press), South Korea (Kim et. al.; Sohn and Wall 1993) and Japan (Callister and Wall 1994).

These studies broadened our perspective by demonstrating the effects of norms, values, and perceptions on conflict management in these Eastern countries. Likewise, the works revealed the impact of conflict management goals. For example, in China the primary goal of mediation is societal harmony, not an integrative agreement for the disputants. Therefore, Chinese

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James A. Wall, Jr. is a Professor of Management in the College of Business and Public Administration, Middlebush Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211. He is President-Elect of the International Association of Conflict Management (IACM) and his publications include articles on judicial and community mediation. Ronda Roberts Callister is completing her doctoral degree in the Management Department, College of Business and Public Administration, University of Missouri, Columbia. Her research interests include organizational socialization and conflict management.

mediators intervene enthusiastically and press disputants rather vigorously toward agreement. The Japanese, by contrast, resist mediating unless they feel it is important to do so. Like the Chinese, they value harmony; yet they perceive that mediation is risky because it creates tandem obligations: For the disputants there is the obligation to repay this service, and for the mediator there is an unstated commitment to continue with assistance. Consequently, when they do mediate, the Japanese are generally subtle and nonassertive.

As they highlighted differences among the countries, these studies exposed a strong commonality, one that is shared with the United States. All of these nations have traditions that draw upon a long history of written language. Such traditions have molded the societies' perspectives on conflict as well as the approaches to managing and/or resolving it.

It seems that the perspectives and approaches might be different in societies which are based on an oral, rather than written, tradition. To investigate this conjecture, we examined ho'oponopono, or mediation, in Hawaii. Examination of mediation in this oral-based society was expected to broaden our perspective on conflict and perhaps provide approaches that would be of use in our society.

### Overview

Ho'oponopono is an integral and ancient part of Polynesian culture. The Polynesians, it is believed, migrated from central Asia, through the islands east of China into Polynesia. They migrated to the Tonga-Samoa region where the roots of the Polynesian culture emerged. From there they migrated through the Marquesas, probably landing in Hawaii between 100 and 750 A.D. (Kirch 1985). Since they had no written language and were migrating to unoccupied islands or to ones whose inhabitants were also illiterate, the Polynesians left no precise records of these routes.

As they settled some islands and explored many others, the Polynesians became skilled at fishing, hunting and farming. Men had their tasks — mainly hunting and fishing — and women theirs; however, there were no specific day-to-day routines or strong divisions of labor within the sexes. The Polynesian social organization stressed blood kinship and accorded high status to the elders (chiefs) as well as to the priests (Kirch 1985).

For Hawaiians, Western contact first occurred in 1778 with Captain Cook's arrival. Christian missionaries followed in the 1820s and 1830s, and many Hawaiians eventually converted to Christianity. However, their religious practices typically were semi-Christian, involving a blend of traditional Hawaiian religion, superstition, and Christian rituals.

Because they had no writing, the Polynesians, at the time of Western contact, were heavily dependent on oratory in their day-to-day lives and for recording their history. Public speaking was used to welcome guests, as well as to solve fishing issues, to coordinate with neighboring villages, and to resolve disputes (Boggs and Chun 1990; Buck 1965b).

As they migrated and fished, the Polynesian Hawaiians developed skills as navigators and sailors. They named the stars that gave them direction for sailing, both east-west and north-south (Buck 1965a). The Polynesian navigator could recognize and name over 100 stars and knew the rough position indicated by each. Like their navigational skills, their boats were impressive. Some were 150 feet in length and, when well-stocked, enabled family groups to sail thousands of miles (Emory 1965).

### Conflict and Its Resolution

Sailing, linked with the Polynesian oral tradition, gave rise to a strong use of metaphors. One most relevant to the study of conflict resolution is "entanglement." To the fisherman, sailor, or navigator, "entanglement" has an unequivocally negative connotation. A tangled fishing line requires hours of tedious unraveling, probably a lost fish or two, and the potential loss of the entire fishing line or net. When tacking, a tangled rope can snap a boat's mast. And for a sea turtle, entanglement in the net means death.

Drawing from these observations, the Hawaiians began using the term "entanglement" to describe interpersonal conflict. Accordingly, conflict resolution was referred to as ho'oponopono, "disentangling" or "putting things right" (Boggs and Chun 1990; Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972). For the most part, ho'oponopono was intended and used for resolving intra-family disputes (Ogawa 1978). A survey conducted in 1976 (Alu Like Inc. 1976) reported that in households containing persons of self-defined Hawaiian ancestry, more than one-third engaged in ho'oponopono. However, over the years ho'oponopono has been used frequently to resolve any interpersonal conflict (see, e.g., Hawaii Bound School Inc. 1980; Paglinawan and Paglinawan 1972). It is also currently used to establish the penalties and restitution for repeat criminal offenders (Kamhis 1992).

Like the process of mediation in any society, ho'oponopono is highly variant. Its users — both today and in the past — employ many different techniques and vary the combinations and sequencing to fit the situation. This being the case, the unique archetype of ho'oponopono cannot be specified. However, numerous reports and case studies of ho'oponopono have been collected (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972), which yield a representative example of the steps that are typically used. In general, ho'oponopono consists of twelve steps (see Table 1), each having a distinct origin or purpose.

### Rationale for the Steps

For the first step, the goal is straightforward: to address the dispute that is generating stress, hard feelings, ill will, etc. Not only does the dispute have undesirable outcomes for each party, it is also thought to bind or "tangle" the disputants in anger or guilt, which in turn causes them to become ill. Moreover there is also the fear that the gods or family guardians (*amuakua*) may be offended by the conflict (Howard 1974; Pukui, Haertig and Lee 1972).

**Table 1**  
**Steps in Ho'oponopono**

1. Gathering of the disputants by a "high status" family or community member who knows the parties.
2. Opening prayer to the gods (or God).
3. A statement of the problem to be solved or prevented from growing worse.
4. Questioning of involved participants by the leader.
5. Replies to the leader and a discussion channeled through the leader.
6. Periods of silence.
7. Honest confession to the gods (or God) and to each of the disputants.
8. Immediate restitution or arrangements to make restitution as soon as possible.
9. The "settling to right" of each successive problem that becomes apparent as ho'oponopono proceeds. (Repeating the above steps if necessary).
10. Mutual forgiveness of the other and releasing him or her from guilt, grudges and tensions from the wrong-doing.
11. Closing prayer.
12. A meal or snack.

Step 2 as well as Steps 7 and 11 have distinct religious connotations. Early Hawaiians believed in gods who played an active part in the world (Handy and Pukui 1977). After they were "converted" to Christianity, the Hawaiians tended, more or less, to believe in one God who also was an active player in their daily lives. For years following conversion to Christianity, Hawaiians would try Western ways of solving problems (or illnesses) but if these were unsuccessful, they would revert to traditional approaches (Kodama-Nishimoto et al. 1984).

In modern times, we generally consider superstition and belief in a variety of nature gods to be pagan; for Hawaiians, it was quite logical and functional. When watching a seed grow, hoping for fish to bite, or experiencing heavy seas, ancient Hawaiians tried to comprehend nature and its forces. Lacking scientific explanations, they interpreted nature as godlike forces. And as other early people, they attempted to understand, obey, and draw assistance from these gods.

This superstitious approach was in many ways beneficial, for it assisted the ancients in adapting to their environment. For example, the ancient Hawaiians selected farmland that Laka liked; that is, land that was already supporting wild vegetation. They planted sweet potatoes in the months when they grew best, months that belonged to Kane-puaa, the special sweet-potato god (see Wichman 1965).

The Hawaiians, as they sought to obey and pacify the gods, were actually learning and remembering how to adapt to natural forces. In addition, invoking the gods' names strengthened generation-to-generation oral tradi-

tions. Consider, for example, the information about potato-planting, which is rather dull and could easily be forgotten. But a dictum from a priest or elder that Kane-puaa will be angry if you fail to plant correctly is more memorable. And to repeat stories of those who angered Kane-puaa and lost their crops — by planting at the wrong time — further anchors the memory.

Just as it assisted the Hawaiians in their agriculture, superstition aided them in their interpersonal relations. Harmony and cooperation were necessary in their society — for fishing, building ships, or sailing long distances. The ancients probably could recognize this and passed it along to future generations, via religion and superstition. Consider, for example the message that "harmony is good; and conflict is bad." Like objective potato-planting information, this is dull and easily forgotten. On the other hand, the belief that the gods did not like social entanglements and thereby punished disputing — entangled — people with physical illness (Howard 1974; Pukui, Hae-tig, and Lee, 1972) is both compelling and memorable.

As Steps 2, 7 and 11 reveal, the Hawaiians' superstitions and religion serve as strong cleats for ho'oponopono. The traditional process begins with an opening prayer (step 2) wherein the gods are recognized and asked for assistance in identifying and resolving the problem(s). This prayer also reminds those present that there are powers and goals greater than themselves (Kamhi 1992).

The honest confession to the gods of the wrongdoing, grievances, grudges, or resentments may perplex an outsider. Granted, gods are significant players and can be called upon for assistance. But why must the disputants confess to them? There are several plausible replies to this question.

One is that the gods do not like conflict or entanglements. In nature, entanglement is bad, and analogously, parties who socially entangle themselves offend the gods. The offense must therefore be acknowledged, and forgiveness must be sought. As the disputant takes these steps, the transgressions against the spirits, gods, and other humans disappear (Boggs and Chun 1990).

A more secular explanation is that conflict and the resultant guilt disrupt social activities. Such disruptions, perhaps because of supernatural nudgings, lead to failed turtle-hunting, injury, or illness to the disputants or to third parties. The gods, it is felt, can rectify these social and physical problems; however, confession is necessary before they will do so. That is, some form of coaxing or reciprocity is in order.

A final explanation is one of catharsis. Expressing one's guilt in a public forum and asking for forgiveness releases tensions. For the Hawaiians this public forum encompasses more than the grievant and the observing family members; it also includes the transcendental, observing, gods.

In Step 11, the closing prayer is offered to thank the gods for their assistance and to verify the process or outcome. It also pressures the disputants to hold to the agreement, that is, to close the door on the evil, to keep it from returning.

Complementing these three supernatural steps are four procedural ones: namely Step 3, statement of the problem; Step 4, questioning of the participants; Step 5, controlled discussion; and Step 6, periods of silence.

The common element in these four steps is the leader's dominant role (Ito 1983). She or he states the problem, questions the participants, requires that all replies and discussion be channeled through her or him, and requires silence. The roots or beginning of this structuring are somewhat ambiguous. It could stem from the leader's high status or *manna* (personal power and effectiveness) (Boggs and Chun 1990). Or it could surface from the idea that the leader is the intermediary between the human disputants and the gods. Since all human-god communication must be channeled through him, the leader has the right to serve the same role between mortals (Boggs and Chun 1990).

While the genesis of this strong leader-as-intermediary procedure will probably never be known, the current intent of Steps 3-5 is quite clear: They maintain control. One of the core presumptions or requirements of *ho'oponopono* is that the participants maintain control over their aggressive feelings. Disputants can cry, express guilt, or accuse the other party, but they must also control displays of temper and hostility.

The periods of silence (Step 6) promote self-reflection and cool tempers. But more importantly, they are intended to pool emotional-spiritual forces for a common — dispute resolution — process. The roots for this step can be traced to three different factors. First, the Hawaiians have learned perhaps through trial and error that periods of silence do assist conflict resolution. Secondly, Polynesians and Hawaiians believe in an individual "force" or spiritual forces that can be utilized or combined to solve (or exacerbate) problems. Finally, recall that the Hawaiians extrapolate heavily from their nature experiences. Early Polynesians no doubt learned the value of silently contemplating the ebb and flow of the waves or patiently studying the currents. Such silent reflections guided them, helped them learn, and consequently kept them from being washed to sea. Given its value in the natural order, silent reflection came to be a guide in interpersonal affairs.

Three of the later steps have a more interpersonal orientation. In Step 8 the immediate restitution — setting things right — or evening the keel corrects the current problem and sets the stage for continued harmony. The word "immediate" is significant. Since the Polynesian society was verbal, agreements or contacts were not written down. Therefore, the more immediate the restitution, the less confusion or forgetting, and thereby a reduction of future conflict.

Step 9 is thought of as "peeling the onion" (*mahiki*) dealing with each layer of difficulty one at a time; usually it involves repeating earlier steps several times. *Ho'oponopono* may last for several hours or even several days, ending in resolution. Or, it may be left incomplete.

Many times, the paring reveals lengthy cause-and-effect chains of events. For example, in finding one person burned a neighbor's field

because he was angry, the elder might discover the anger stemmed from the neighbor's insult to the arsonist's wife, who previously had allowed her children to romp in the neighbor's garden. As this example illustrates, *mahiki* detects submerged currents in the conflict: some are peripheral, others flow from the original conflict, a few are not related. During *ho'oponopono*, all of these issues are brought to the surface.

In Step 10, the emphasis is on mutual forgiveness and releasing the other from the entanglement. For complete conflict resolution, the restitution and objectively setting things right is not sufficient. *Ho'oponopono* requires that everything must be set right spiritually as well as interpersonally (Boggs and Chun 1990). Accompanying this alignment must be a freeing of the other — the forgiven one — from the entanglement of one's anger.

From a Western perspective, this forgiveness serves a useful purpose for the offending party. She or he feels better because she knows the party ceases to hold a grudge. From a Polynesian perspective there is an additional payoff: the forgiveness also frees the offending party from potential harm. Recall that the ancients felt that misconduct was punished by physical illness. In a similar vein, they believed that holding a grudge could be damaging, because the wrongdoer, along with the transgression and the wronged, are all linked together — entangled — until the transgression and grudges are dispelled.

In the final step comes the capstone meal, which is a thanksgiving to the gods for their assistance. Originally this was a feast, but today, a simple meal is considered adequate. No alcohol is permitted here or at any other phase of *ho'oponopono*, because of the belief that people will not adequately control their feelings while under the influence of alcohol (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972).

### Lessons for the Western Mediator

Extrapolation from *ho'oponopono* to other cultures yields dual benefits, the first of which is a broader perspective toward mediation. Typically, Westerners view mediation from a logical perspective, one which stems in part from our written tradition. A look at *ho'oponopono* reveals how a society reliant on oral tradition can also develop and maintain effective community mediation.

A second and more practical payoff is that several steps of *ho'oponopono* could be adapted by Western mediators as part of their regular procedure. Of particular interest would be the three "process" steps — Step 4, Questioning of involved participants by the leader; Step 5, Replies to the leader and discussion channeled through the leader; and Step 6, Periods of silence.

The first two steps allow emotions to be expressed. In most conflicts, emotions play a central role, serving as causes, effects, and as critical elements of the core process; however, the dominant practice in mediations in the United States and other Western nations is to downplay the emotional

facet, emphasizing the logical aspects. Allowing the disputants to discuss the conflict with the leader provides a more balanced approach; it allows an emotional release, but it is controlled: the questions, replies, and periods of silence regulate the catharsis. Consequently, there is a balance between the emotional release and process control.

Step 9 — the “setting to right” of each successive problem that becomes apparent as ho’oponopono proceeds — also has potential payoffs for Western mediations.

Western conflict resolution is generally legalistic; that is, Western mediators tend to slice away peripheral issues, driving to the point. In ho’oponopono, these adjacent issues are always explored as the parties explain their overall actions and emotions. For example, in the dispute about the burned field, the conversation might drift to the idea that the wife’s own garden was not a very good one. Or the neighbor’s father had given the garden to him just before he died and asked him to care diligently for it. Such drifting to adjacent, perhaps irrelevant, topics does have benefits: like Steps 4 and 5, it allows for catharsis. At times such conversations may unearth some significant but neglected components of the conflict. Even if it fails to reveal hidden primary elements, the “peeling back” can provide useful information to mediators (e.g., which facets of the conflict are most important to the disputants). And it affords the mediator or the opponent an opportunity to hear and openly empathize with the disputants’ concerns.

A final potential application of ho’oponopono is more easily advised than administered. Step 10 — mutual forgiveness of the other and releasing him or her from guilt, grudges and tensions from the wrong doing — is not a task a mediator can necessarily institute. Typically in Western mediations, apologies are avoided because they cause embarrassment and imply that one person is “good” and the other “bad.” Our mediators simply help to fabricate an agreement that both sides purport to support. But many of these agreements are not implemented successfully because one party dislikes the other, holds a grudge, or believes the other party, because of rancor, will eventually seek retribution.

Sincere mutual forgiveness will reduce such impediments. In China and South Korea, this approach is easily executed because an apology, especially mutual apology, saves face rather than embarrasses. In Western cultures, people tend to link apology with admission of fault, shame and embarrassment; therefore, implementation of this step will be difficult. But it is not an impossible goal, as is shown by victim-offender mediations, where offenders generally express regret and offer an apology to the victim. When the apology is accepted, the offender often feels released from the guilt, and the victim, in turn, harbors less enmity toward the offender.

## Conclusion

In closing, we offer some words of caution to our prescriptions. Most of the steps in ho’oponopono require mediators to hold substantial power, and implementation of these steps increases this power. When empowered, the mediators must avoid a variety of power-based pitfalls (Rubin 1994); namely, they should not disrupt a conflict that is moving toward resolution on its own; they should not press their own interests; and they should not impose an agreement.

Failure to heed this caution will teach our mediators a lesson the Polynesians learned centuries ago: Applying force to an entanglement — be it a rope or relationship — appears initially to improve the problem. Yet it usually makes it worse.

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# Ho'oponopono - To Set Right

## A Hawaiian Peacemaking Process

Manu Meyer

Harvard Graduate School of Education

A paper to fulfill course requirements for H310C - Creating Peaceful School Communities

Instructor: Steven Brion-Meisels

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He ali'i ka la'i, he haku na ke aloha - Peace is a chief, the lord of love  
Where peace is, there love abides also  
(Pukui, 1983)

There is a push in today's mediation circles to include forms of Native American conflict resolution practices, especially when problems arise in these communities. Currently, the U.S. Government recognizes approximately 517 Native American tribes. (LeResche, 1993) Native Americans are defined as American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians. Over 252 languages are spoken in addition to English within the indigenous people of North America and the Pacific and at least that many different ways exist to resolve conflicts. Each tribe, island or community, whether urban or rural, has held from antiquity, unique tools and philosophies for the who, how, what and why of problem resolution. These tools and values are now beginning to play a more important role in the renewal of strength, national pride and empowerment of native people. As we close the United Nations "Year of Indigenous People" and prepare for the 1995 start of the "Decade of Indigenous People", this focus is particularly timely as it highlights the cultural richness of Native American indigenous people and helps broaden the definition of diversity and enriches the peacemaking milieu.

Native American mediation practices are best described as peace making and vary with every tribe, family, community, village, island or formal or informal gathering. At the core of Native American peacemaking is a sense of spirituality, a respect for ancestors, a focus on balance and harmony, and above all, an honoring of land. (LeResche,

1993; Pukui,1972) Native ways of healing conflicts are seen as *relationship-centered* and not *agreement-centered*. (LeResche,1993) The goal of peacemaking is the maintenance of a strong community and usually this is accomplished with adherence to a different philosophy of justice. This peacemaking philosophy is described as "sacred justice" and includes processes that lead to a renewed strength in community, restoring of harmony between individuals and groups, and a return to peace via restitution, apologies and forgiveness.

Peacemaking and mediation have two distinct vocabularies. Mediation terms like dispute and conflict become, in a peacemaking context: "stubborn disagreement", "having differences" and for Hawaiians, "entanglement." Words like punishment, revenge, and right in mediation become restitution, forgiveness, truth in peacemaking. Clearly, in a philosophical way, mediation and peacemaking differ in both process and product. Peacemaking is not concerned with distributing justice, finding who is right, dispensing punishment, but rather strives for the maintenance of harmony between individuals and the exhibition of spiritual efficacy. Both peacemaking and mediation, however, strive for the ending of conflict. This may best be accomplished, in a Native American community, by understanding and practicing the rich cultural ways conflict is addressed and resolved. This paper describes one such indigenous peacemaking process.

Aloha mai no, aloha aku; o ka huhu ka mea e ola 'ole ai  
When love is given, love should be returned; anger is the thing that gives no life  
(Pukui,1983)

One tool for the maintenance of the aloha, (love) described in this 'olelo no'eau (wise saying) is ho'oponopono. Literally meaning, "setting to right", "to make right", ho'oponopono was a way of "correcting" the imbalance in a family. This paper will describe ho'oponopono, a Native Hawaiian peacemaking process, and define its role in a newly created Hawai'i program, Na'au Pono. Ho'oponopono vocabulary will be defined and the process outlined to give the reader a clear and sequential understanding of the values, tools, context, timing and process of ho'oponopono. A visual is also included to give the reader a pictorial glance at ho'oponopono. This paper will also discuss modern problems and concerns with regard to facilitating successful ho'oponopono. These concerns and their solutions will be outlined with relation to Na'au Pono, a ho'oponopono demonstration project. Na'au Pono, a



peacemaking program spearheaded by the Native Hawaiian Bar Association, is slated to begin receiving referrals from the Family Court of the First Circuit in the state of Hawai'i by the Fall of 1994.

Most of the information gathered for this paper is from five sources: Mary Kawena Pukui's thoughts as written in *Nana i Ke Kumu*, the *Hawaii Bound Operations Manual*, discussions and work with kupuna (elder) Abbie Napeahi, workshops and discussions with Lynette Paglinawan, and a brief experience with kupuna Malia Craver. Some of the author's personal insights and experiences as haku (facilitator) of ho'oponopono will also be cited. This information is written in honor of ho'oponopono and it is hoped that by sharing the process, it can be of assistance to other cultures and a clearer light for Native Hawaiians.

### Ho'oponopono - To Set Right

Ho'oponopono, in this context, is a family problem-solving process. It is an ancient Hawaiian communication practice that is based on the physical and spiritual need for everyone in the family to work together and aid in the well being of each other. Ho'oponopono was essentially a family experience and often practiced only between immediate family members. Maintaining harmony and survival in ancient Hawai'i helped develop the practice of ho'oponopono and kept it useful and current. Each family member played an important role in the survival of the group and harmony was a vital link in this continual process. While harmony was the link that kept family members surviving and working together, ho'oponopono was the clasp that kept the links together. This need for harmony is no less important in modern Hawai'i. We may no longer depend on each other for physical survival but the need to help heal, resolve conflicts and maintain peace within our families is as important now as it was in ancient Hawai'i.

Beyond the issues of entanglement that would give cause for a family to gather, setting the stage for a ho'oponopono begins with choosing the haku (facilitator). In ancient Hawai'i, this person was most likely from the healing, professional class, the kahuna. Today, however, haku are most often elders who are respected and not involved in the issues that brought about the ho'oponopono. Today, haku can be male or female; in ancient times, the haku was most likely male. The haku is a vital element in facilitation and in setting the tone of aloha. The spirit of aloha (love, affection) is the spirit that ties the family together and

it is the underlying compassion that sets the tone for ho'oponopono. Before a ho'oponopono can begin, however, five conditions must be understood and agreed upon by each participant.

### Five Conditions that set the stage for Ho'oponopono

1. Each individual in the 'ohana (family) must share a common commitment to be part of the problem solving process.
2. All words and deeds that are part of ho'oponopono will be shared in an atmosphere of 'oia i'o. (the essence of truth)
3. The 'ohana must share a common sense of aloha for one another or be committed to reinstating that spirit.
4. Everything that is said in a ho'oponopono is done in confidence and will **not** be repeated when the session is complete.
5. The haku (facilitator) must be commonly agreed on as a fair and impartial channel through which the ho'oponopono is done.

The above five conditions must be agreed upon by all members in a ho'oponopono. This is accomplished by the haku (facilitator) ritualizing the tone of sincerity and commitment by asking the members if they agree to each of the five conditions. The haku has the right to pause and assess a participant's sincerity at this time and end, postpone or continue the process based on what he/she feels is appropriate. A ho'oponopono does not begin if members are not willing to agree to the five conditions.

The ritualizing and agreeing to the five conditions of ho'oponopono differs greatly as families vary in their experience of the process. In a family that understands the process and structure, the ritualizing of these five conditions is not necessary, members come to the ho'oponopono understanding, fully, the five conditions and agree to them by their participation. Often, however, because ho'oponopono continues to be vague and new for many modern Hawaiian families, the five conditions are clearly presented and clearly agreed upon. Agreeing to the five conditions sets the stage for commitment, honesty and privacy and helps give the discussion that follows a sense of foundation, fairness, structure and expectation. It is these five conditions that set the stage for a successful, relationship-centered resolution process. Ho'oponopono can now begin.

## Ho'oponopono Definitions

'Ohana	Family blood ties, more recently a very close grouping
Haku	An unbiased mediator, one that is respected by all
'Aumakua	Family god often represented by a living creature or plant
Pule Wehe	Opening prayer, usually said to the family aumakua
Kukulu Kumuhana	A pooling of mana (energy/strength) directed to a positive goal. A unified force. This is also the clear, objective statement of the problem made by the haku
Mahiki	The discussion of the problem, a time to unravel, to peel off each layer or event that has created the hihia
Hihia	Tangling of emotions that hinders forgiveness
Hala	Fault or transgression
Ho'omauhala	Period of unrest, still holding a grudge, hostility
Ho'omalū	A silent period, a 'time-out', a resting period
'Oia I'o	The flesh of truth, absolute truth, the essence of truth
Mihi	Forgiveness, repentance, apology, confession
Kala	To release, untie, free, unbind
Mo Ka Piko	To sever the umbilical cord; symbolically, to cut off an 'ohana member (an infrequent ending, but an option)
Pule Ho'opau	Closing prayer

### Pule wehe

Ho'oponopono begins with a pule wehe (opening prayer). This prayer is said by the haku and is addressed to family 'aumakua, god or gods to ask for guidance, strength, clarity and healing.

### Kukulu kumuhana

Kukulu kumuhana is a form of spiritual solidarity. In kukulu kumuhana, people focus on one person or a problem, thus unifying their mana, (spiritual strength) for positive ends. Kukulu kumuhana is the pooling of emotional, physical and spiritual strength of family members for a shared purpose and it is always present in a successful ho'oponopono. Kukulu kumuhana is both a conscious and unconscious aspect of ho'oponopono. Mutual concern, sensitivity and concern for each other's welfare brings about the spirit of kukulu kumuhana. This spirit can be facilitated by the haku who can ask for this 'pooling of energy' during a ho'oponopono when there is clearly a time when participants are ho'omauhala, stuck in hostility. It is during this time when ho'oponopono members stop to spiritually and mindfully help

break the barriers that keep this member stuck, angry or bitter. It is a critical step in ho'oponopono

The kukulu kumuhana is also a clear, objective statement of the problem that is said by the haku after or during the pule wehe (opening prayer). The kukulu kumuhana is a statement that usually defines why the ho'oponopono was called and therefor begins the actual discussion process. It is interesting to note that the term for the 'pooling of strength' and the 'statement of the problem' is the same word. It is apparent that the statement of the problem is offered in a hopeful context of spiritual solidarity. This sets the philosophical base for why ho'oponopono is so often successful, like planting seeds in fertile soil. The very nature of kukulu kumuhana is both the statement of the problem in the context of solution, the clarification of the wrong-doing in the promise of community.

### Mahiki

After members agree to the five conditions, after the haku invokes spiritual guidance through the pule wehe and announces the statement of the problem in kukulu kumuhana, the mahiki phase of ho'oponopono can begin. Mahiki is this process of working on one layer at a time and inching toward the source of trouble, the fault, the transgression. Thus begins the untangling of emotions, actions and motivations to dispose of yet another, deeper layer of acts, feelings and causes. (Pukui, 1972) The haku, in the process of mahiki, deals with **one problem at a time**, tracing it from start to finish. Like peeling an onion, each layer must remain separate and dealt with before the next layer is peeled. Mahiki is the disposing of one layer of action, motivation or emotion to reveal and dispose of another layer of acts and feelings. It is the heart of a ho'oponopono, the time when problems are discussed.

It is important to note that during mahiki, members of a ho'oponopono talk only to the haku, and only when given permission. In this manner, the haku is able to deflect anger and help clarify emotions and thoughts of participants who may be too hihia (entangled) to speak clearly. This fact varies from haku to haku, but a general rule is that anger and emotions are important and valuable in ho'oponopono but do not run unchecked and misdirected.

Mahiki is the time of probing and questioning by the haku and self-reflection and inquiry on behalf of the participants. As the 'ohana is able to understand the situation through mahiki and the identification

of hala (fault/transgression) and hihia (entangled emotions) they are coming closer to mihi (forgiveness).

### Ho'omalulu

This is a time during ho'oponopono when people are given a "time-out", a time when no-one speaks to each other, a time to gather strength, think in quietude. It is a silent period. Usually, a haku calls ho'omalulu to quell mounting tension, give people a rest and offer a time for silence and reflection. Ho'omalulu is a valuable and useful tool in ho'oponopono as it ritualizes the time when family members eat, gain strength, kukulu kumuhana or pool their energies for the benefit of the group. Ho'omalulu is designed to cool down emotions and to look inward for strength and guidance. Ho'omalulu can last a few minutes, hours or days.

### 'Oia i'o

Absolute truth, sincerity, the spirit and essence of truth. 'Oia i'o is one of the five conditions members of a ho'oponopono agree to before it begins. This form of truth has many characteristics. It is "total truth without innuendo, intentional omission or slanting of facts and presentation. It is truth in the feeling sense. You feel whether what you are saying is 'oia i'o or not. Hawaiians believed the intellect and emotions both came from the na'au (viscera or gut). Real truth, real sincerity, comes from na'au 'oia i'o. From "truthful guts." (Pukui,1972) It is this style of truth, no matter how painful it may be to others, that is expected in ho'oponopono. Thus, "the essential element of ho'oponopono is the total revealing of what really happened, for until everyone involved knows clearly who did what to whom and why, no remedy for the situation can be reached." (Pukui,1972)

### Ho'omauhala

If a person is unable to release himself and others from the hala (fault) or any part of the hihia (entangled emotions) he is said to be ho'omauhala, to be holding a grudge. When this cannot be overcome simply, ho'omalulu is called. This period of silence is to give the person in ho'omauhala a chance to be quiet, reflect on his/her actions and allows the group to gather their strength and focus. A haku may then invoke the process of kukulu kumuhana in which the entire 'ohana focuses their prayers, thoughts and aloha on the individual who is in need of help and perspective to handle forgiveness. Both ho'omalulu and kukulu kumuhana are tools for dealing with high levels of emotions and for invoking a sense of group responsibility for helping emotions come to resolution and forgiveness.

## Mihi

Mihi is the forgiveness, apology, confession stage of a ho'oponopono and is usually charged with sincerity and profound emotions. During mihi, the haku no longer acts as the mediator of words and emotions but allows members to talk directly to one another. Mihi sets the stage for a deep sense of resolution as defined in kala.

## Kala

Once a point of forgiveness has been reached by the individuals involved in the original hala (transgression), the next step is called kala, to release, to untie, to free each other completely. "Hawaiians recognized that the figurative cord linking sinner and sinned-against in mutual unpleasantness must be 'untied', not by one but both." (Pukui, 1972) The culprit must confess, repent and make restitution. There is no release until there has been a complete severing of the wrongs and the personal conflicts between the individuals involved. (Hawaii Bound, 1979) Kala is an ideal, a concept that was not easy to attain. In ho'oponopono kala is expressed in the phrase: (Pukui, 1972)

Ke kala aku nei 'au ia 'oe a pela noho'i 'au e kala ia mai ai  
I unbind you from the fault, and thus may I also be unbound by it

"Today, kala is a mutual process in which both the instigator and recipient of an offense are released from the emotional bondage Hawaiians call hala. This forgiving, freeing and releasing concept of Hawaii's expressive culture is quite different from the 'forgive and forget' ideal of a repressive society. For what is 'forgotten' is actually repressed. Kala seeks to strip the incident of its pain-causing attributes. An insult of injustice may be remembered, but if mihi and kala have been sincere, it is remembered as 'no big thing anymore'." (Pukui, 1972) The experience of kala is the mark of a successful ho'oponopono. Kala is marked with many differences, but there are some universal traits: a sense of releasing, a deep and profound emptying, a feeling that something has been lifted from the group, a lightness, an upwelling of aloha. This is healing.

## Mo ka piko

Ho'oponopono ends in resolution or else it is not complete. It may go on for hours or perhaps over a period of days, but resolution is essential. This does not mean that all problems have amiable solutions. There is an option in ho'oponopono called mo ka piko, literally to sever the umbilical cord. This is used only in extreme cases and only after all

other means have been exhausted. For instance, if an individual flatly refuses to participate in the problem-solving process or to embrace the 'ohana with any sense of aloha, he/she may be cut off by the group and if restitution is not made, they may be subsequently asked to leave the 'ohana for good. (Hawaii Bound, 1979)

### Pule ho'opau

A successful ho'oponopono will end with a drained yet united and uplifted 'ohana. The process is put to rest with a pule ho'opau, (closing prayer) which gives thanks for guidance and asks for continued support. Often, this prayer is directed to god, gods or the family 'aumakua. Ho'oponopono must begin and end in prayer. This sense of spirituality is fundamental in this Hawaiian peacemaking process. To think one could attempt ho'oponopono without the guidance of a spiritual force is to deny the truth of what makes it work. It is precisely this spirituality that helps guide a ho'oponopono to kala.

## Na'au Pono Demonstration Project A Ho'oponopono Program in the State of Hawai'i

The Na'au Pono Demonstration Project is the offspring of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association (NHBA). This program plans to develop a peacemaking center in the state of Hawai'i that would offer ho'oponopono to clientele of Hawaiian ancestry. It is slated to begin in the spring of 1994. The project aims to train 30 haku over a two year period. Once trained, the haku will be available for referral for ho'oponopono services. Na'au Pono will undertake an intake and referral system from the Family Court of the First Circuit in disputed child and adult custody matters involving Hawaiian clientele.

### Case Load

Na'au Pono hopes to handle 30 cases the first year of operation and 60 cases during the second year of operation. All cases will deal with child and adult custody cases involving Hawaiian families that are referred from the Family Court. The Na'au Pono Demonstration Project is intended to provide services while also collecting data which presently does not exist concerning Hawaiians in the divorce, paternity, Chapter 587, and guardianship processes at the First Circuit Court. This information will be used to evaluate and design the service model throughout the two years.

## Kukulu kumuhana

Na'au Pono is a welcomed and needed program that has the capacity for educational, cultural and spiritual empowerment. I feel that supporting the act and fact of Na'au Pono is somewhat like kukulu kumuhana and that now we are pooling together the energies and strengths of our Hawaiian people for a common goal. There are many concerns that will be addressed at the Master Plan Retreat, scheduled for February 1994, and the following is one haku's list:

### Questions and Concerns For Na'au Pono Master Plan Retreat

#### 1. The choosing of haku

Deciding who will be haku for our Hawaiian people will be the single most important task the Na'au Pono Director and NHBA will face. Haku will set the tone for whether a program of this scope will survive and whether cultural avenues to justice will be successful.

I believe haku should be male or female, from all islands and able to communicate in either Hawaiian, pidgin (Hawaiian Creole) or standard English. Haku should be respected members of a community with a sensitivity to na mea Hawai'i (things Hawaiian), Hawaiian values and Hawaiian ways of thinking. They should be from the kupuna or makua level (grandparent or parent). Haku should have a fundamental belief in the life of the spirit and be able to call upon this aspect on behalf of others. Haku do not have to be fully employed, or fully unemployed. The haku is the vital aspect. Na'au Pono should have the flexibility to create a schedule that is conducive to all parties. Haku may bring a kako'o (support) into a ho'oponopono. This person may act as a legal support or be someone the haku is mentoring.

#### 2. Payment of haku

This is an important issue that cannot be underestimated. Haku were not allowed to accept money for their services in a ho'oponopono as this was seen as belittling the process and taking it from a spiritual context. This issue must be addressed



in a modern context in a sensitive, pragmatic, creative and cultural format.

Perhaps haku will allow members of the ho'oponopono to fix her roof, paint her house, mow her lawn for a year. Money allocated to the haku for her services could go to paying for tools, paint, or the rental of supplies. In this way, ho'oponopono members will be part of the barter process and not just Na'au Pono. In this way, too, a sense of community and 'ohana can be developed on behalf of family members and haku. Of course, this must all be clearly outlined before members enter into a ho'oponopono.

### 3. Timing

This is an aspect of ho'oponopono that is often taken for granted or misunderstood. The timing of a ho'oponopono can rarely be predicted. A ho'oponopono must last until there is resolution. This may take a few hours or a few days. Members cannot leave or enter once a ho'oponopono begins. This is a critical and vital aspect to the success of a ho'oponopono.

This aspect of timing can be addressed clearly during intake and assessment. Na'au Pono staff can set a minimum of one full day for each ho'oponopono and a maximum of three. This means that all members must clear their calendars and be able to be clear of distractions, meetings, phone calls, expectations. In saying yes to the services of Na'au Pono, participants agree to the full time slotted for the ho'oponopono and therefor cannot leave. This is a very important part of planning for success. Participants will get a clear message that this process is different, serious and all are making time for it to work.

### 4. The 'ohana (family) vs. working with strangers

The agreeing to the five conditions for a ho'oponopono must be done in a sincere manner. Haku can detect insincerity and stop the process from going further. Sincere agreement to the five conditions sets a strong foundation for the work that will go on in ho'oponopono. It is vital that the people who enter into ho'oponopono have some basic belief, concern and hope that the problem be resolved.

Na'au Pono staff can assess whether the applicants sincerely wish for resolution and whether they share a history that would want to make this happen. Staff will not choose members who do

not share history or concern for the outcome. This can be part of the intake process. Letting clientele know that the goal is the re-instating of aloha is of spiritual and practical importance. Ho'oponopono is not called if the attitudes of the participants are historically indifferent. There must be a core of aloha that one can return to and if this never existed, then ho'oponopono must not be called.

#### 5. Physical setting for ho'oponopono

The actual setting and environment of ho'oponopono is also a valuable way to kukulu kumuhana. The environment sets the stage for whether 'oia i'o can be given and received. The environment can either add to the process or detract from it.

I believe ho'oponopono can be done inside a home or outside under tarps. There should be no distractions and no-one should be excused to pick up members coming in from the airport, etc. Ho'oponopono begins with the same number it ends with. There is a movement to build hale halawai (meeting house) similar to the one on Kohemalamalama o Kanaloa (Kaho'olawe). These structures would be ideal for ho'oponopono and should be supported for this purpose. Also, ho'oponopono should not start during dusk or evening. Ho'oponopono begins in the morning because, traditionally, it's a time to begin new projects.

#### 6. Training and support of haku

The training and support of haku is crucial. Haku are the medium from which guidance and wisdom flow. Their role in ho'oponopono is pivotal.

Immersion into the skill and art of ho'oponopono should be part of a haku's training. Kupuna will direct this effort in the ways they choose. I would like to support the notion of a mentor for future haku as one learns best, in this case, by watching, listening, experiencing. Because Hawai'i is a "small town", haku should be drawn from all islands and supported to fly in their kako'o, (mentee/support). Training should include the tools of ho'oponopono: ho'omalua, 'oia i'o, pule wehe, kukulu kumuhana, pule ho'opau.

The following questions might be effective if they were posed at the Na'au Pono Master Plan Retreat as they follow the guidelines for how a Peacemaking program might be structured: (Steven Brion-Meisels, 1993)

### Questions to Ask When Forming a Peacemaking Project

#### - WHY

What are the goals of the program? Why are you approaching these goals via the ho'oponopono medium?

#### - WHEN

What is the context where the goals are most likely to occur? What does the timing look like? What is the ideal environment?

#### - HOW

What is the structure? How can this best be applied toward meeting the stated goals? What are potential areas of concern that need to be looked at before the project begins?

#### - WHAT

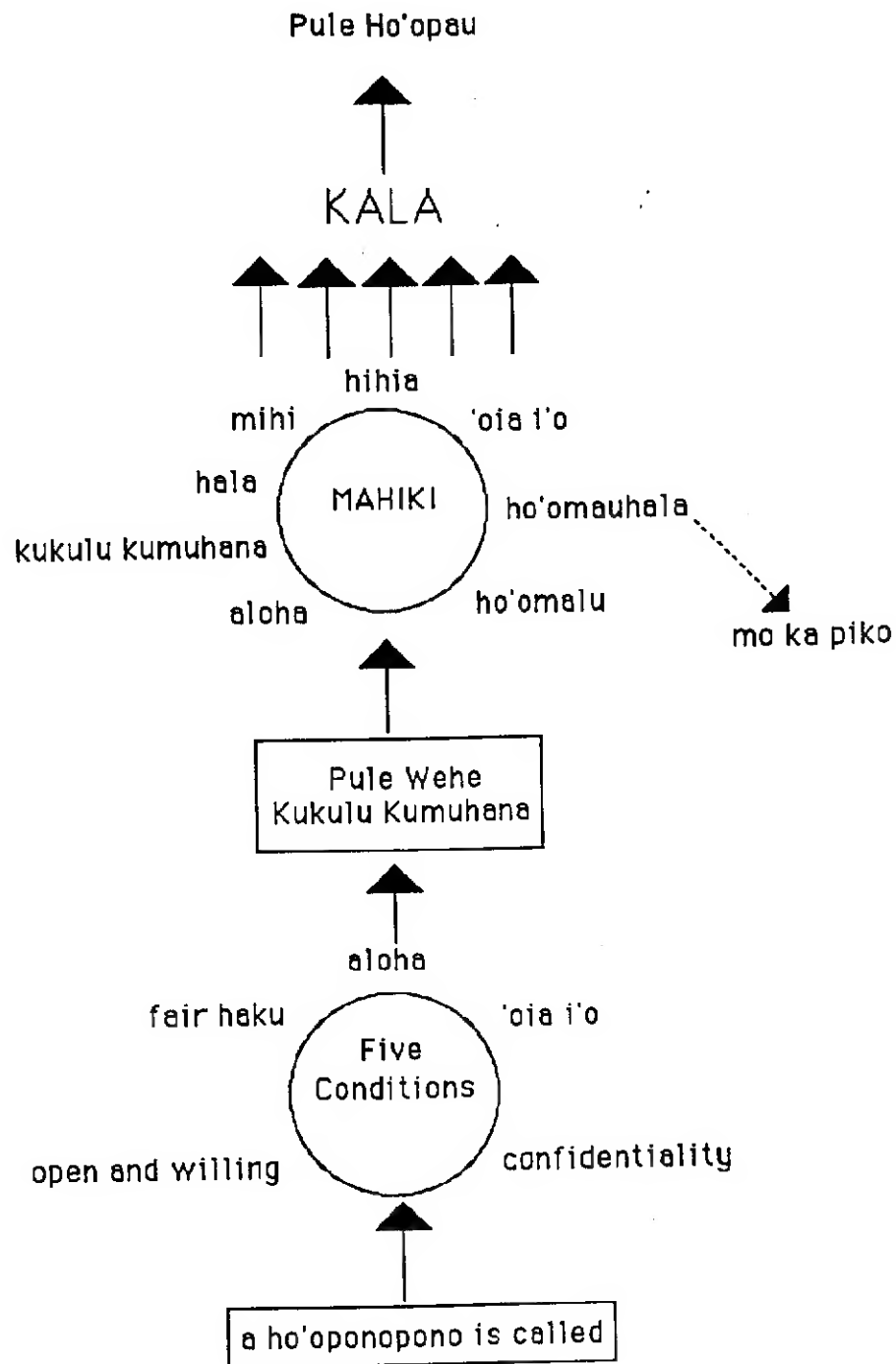
What are the outcomes? Are you planning the project for success? Are the outcomes short-term or long-term? Are the outcomes planned in a Hawaiian or Western construct?

### Summary

The Na'au Pono Demonstration Project is an exciting and timely idea. The thought of a peacemaking center in Hawai'i founded on ho'oponopono, an empowering, powerful and profound tool, is both hopeful and humbling. The efforts of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association should be fully supported by both community and funding sources. The key, however, has never been the issue of money, but of the willingness to gather on behalf of each other. This is what I hope this project will symbolize for Hawaiians. This is how I hope it will be run. It is time to kokua, to help each other secure this vision.

The following are thoughts on behalf of ho'oponopono as a peacemaking tool:

- Hawaiians have the language for peacemaking in ho'oponopono
- Ho'oponopono is a skill that can be taught
- Ho'oponopono is a process that can be learned
- Ho'oponopono is an act of self-determination
- Ho'oponopono is one key to liberation



HO'OPONOPONO – TO SET RIGHT  
A Hawaiian Peacemaking Process  
Visual created by Manu Meyer - January 17, 1994

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# **HO'OPONOPONO**

**High status elder (haku) gathers disputing parties**

**Opening prayer to gods and family guardians (aumakua)**

**Identifies the problem**

**Elder questions the parties**

**Parties acknowledge their actions to gods and each other**

**Talk about solutions, actions to disentangle and to make right (pono)**

**Mutual forgiveness**

**Closing prayer**

**Sharing of meal**